They Burned His Village and Canoes, but Couldn't Frighten

The SILENT CHIEF

By B. A. McKELVIE

ON THE east side of Kitimat Arm, not far distant from where the Kitimats — or "people of the snow"—had their ancestral village, is a quiet little bay of good anchorage and well protected from the winds.

It is a peaceful appearing place. It is named "Clio Bay," and there is nothing to suggest that the naming of it had anything to do with turbulence, but it did; and the place was named for Her Majesty's Ship Clio in December, 1865. The war vessel was on an expedition such as were of frequent occurrence in those days. She was reinforcing the civil authorities in their endeavors to impose the Queen's law on the lonely coast.

HMS Clio was a steam corvette of 1,472 tons, driven by twin engines of 400 h.p. and mounted 22 guns. She was commanded by Captain Nicholas E. B. Turnour, with Lieut. J. B. Carey as first officer. Being propeller driven, she was somewhat of a curiosity to the northern tribes.

The Indians had been becoming bolder and more threatening following the Chilcotin war of the previous year. Insistent demands for a show of force to curb the traffic in liquor by small craft had been coming from William Duncan, the missionary in charge of Metlakatla, the self-sustained Indian community on the north coast.

Governor Frederick Seymour, chief executive of British Columbia, was anxious to assist in the elimination of whisky peddling among the natives. He communicated with Captain Turnour. Governor A. E. Kennedy of Vancouver's Island also looked upon the project with favor. So it was that on November 16 the corvette left Esquimalt to conduct her foray against the rum-sellers.

Few Charts

On the ship were two civilians, Captain Alex. J. Chambers, pilot—for there were few if any charts of the waters that the vessel was to visit. The other was a remarkable man named Morris Moss, a Jewish trader who had been named as special Indian agent on the Coast of the Colony of British Columbia. He had done much public service on the serried coastline. On the way up they put into several villages and searched for liquor without finding any. Finally they reached Fort Simpson, where news of an alarming character was given to the captain.

It was that there had been a cannnibal feast at Kitimat, a remote village off Gardner Canal. The Coast Indians were a ceremonial people, and they had formed a number of secret societies, of which the Hamatsa was the most influential. It was asserted that its initiatory rites were cannibalistic. Complaint was made to the missionaries and passed on to the captain of the Clio, that a small boy had been abducted and killed for a man-eating orgy.

GOVERNOR FREDERICK SEYMOUR
. . . asked navy's aid.

The warship nosed her way into the rock-ribbed channels of Gardner Canal and then up Kitimat Arm, hoping to take the place by surprise. The main village was situated on a river flat, and was of enormous proportions, one main house alone being observed to extend for nearly a mile.

In the shallow water it was found inadvisable to make a landing, so the corvette withdrew to a quiet little bay which was named after the vessel. Here there was good anchorage. The bay is still known by the name of HMS Clio.

Landing

The next morning the launch, pinnace and two cutters loaded with sailors and marines set off shortly after daylight and made a quick passage to the village. Here a landing was made. The men were drawn up in companies and then rushed the village and commenced a search for liquor. This was unavailing, as several Kitimats who were at Fort Simpson when the Clio first arrived, had sent off word to their people to hide any contraband that might be around. A white man, known only as "Frank," was running a little trading store, and he was arrested on suspicion of selling whisky.

The Indians gathered and threatened the naval force as the search was continued. One warrior did make an effort to shoot Lieut. Carey, but was pounced upon. Nothing whatever could be found to substantiate the story of cannibalism. Four of the chief men were taken along when the corvette left the arm. They were held on suspicion of dealing in liquor.

Three small vessels were encountered on the voyage back to Fort Simpson, and these were seized as liquor carriers. They were brought before Mr. Duncan, the missioner, who had a commission as justice of the peace. The grim old man fined one captain £800, in default of payment of which he was to serve eight years in jail; his mate was fined £200 or two years; another captain, his mate and cook were similarly fined, while the two men on a third vessel were each assessed £100 or a year in jail.

These sentences were reduced by Mr. Justice Matthew Begbie the next week at New Westminster, all being let out on their own recognizances in the amount of £100. The sentences were out of all proportion to the offence, the judge declared.

On the way up the coast the Clio had called in at Fort Rupert. This Hudson's Bay post was situated amongst some of the fiercest and most blood-thirsty Indians on the coast. Their chief village was stretched along the beach in front of the palisades, and housed about 1,000 persons. Pym N. Compton, the Hudson's Bay Company clerk in charge, in one respect, was the envy of every traveller who stopped there. He had a Chinese cook who could make the most unappetizing food taste good. Captain Turnour planned to stop for another meal with Compton on his way down.

Trouble

It was late at night when Fort Rupert, on Beaver Harbor, was reached, after a tricky passage through Bate Passage from Queen Charlotte Sound. But within a few moments the Hudson's Bay Company man arrived beside the corvette in a canoe. He was filled with woe.

First, the cook was dead. The Chinaman had taken his own life after confessing that he had murdered two miners in the Cariboo several years before. Now, he said, their ghosts would not let him sleep. This was a disappointment for the captain. But there was an even more serious affair that required attention, Compton said.

The Fort Rupert Indians had murdered a Nahwitti native. His tribe threatened retaliation, but the trader had induced them to wait until the warship returned, to see what action the "Queen's men" would take.

Carey Back

The next morning the pinnace and two cutters filled with armed men went ashore under command of Lieut. Carey. They were met at the water's edge by several hundred armed Indians, brandishing and firing firearms into the air. Still other warriors flourished spears and long-bladed knives. Lieut. Carey demanded the surrender of the three men implicated in the murder. This was refused by Chief Jim and his leading men.

The officer warned the chief that he would be held responsible if trouble started. He added that unless within an hour the three men were given up, that he would have to bombard the village. The Indians countered by saying that if this was done they would burn the fort and kill all those in it.

GOVERNOR ALBERT E. KENNEDY
. . . he concurred.

The marines were marched into the fort to supplement its defence, then Carey seized Chief Jim and hustled him down into a boat and took him out to the Clio. After waiting for the elapse of the time he had given, the Indian houses were cleared of occupants, the corvette was swung around and opened fire. The Indians hid behind the fort, where the shells from the ship could not reach them. They did not attack the fort as they had threatened.

The shelling splintered many of the biggest houses; sending their cedar boards flying into the air. After a time, when the destruction was appreciable, the Indians raised a white flag, lowering four others that they had defiantly waved for a time.

Again Chief Jim was asked if he would order that the three men be delivered to the authorities. His answer was short and definite. "No."

Mr. Compton also addressed the natives from the top of the palisades, but they were obdurate.

The bombardment was recommened, houses crumpling and breaking with every round. Despite the danger, Indians scurried about inside some of the structures burying their winter stores of food. One man and a woman were wounded in this second bombardment. There was but little of the village intact when the firing ceased. Again the chief was asked to comply with the law, and again he refused.

Now the sailors swarmed up the beach bearing torches and set on fire the one or two remaining houses and the ruin of the others. The flames caught hold of the dry cedar planking and soon the whole distance that had formerly been covered with shake houses was a roaring furnace.

It was an anxious time in the fort that night. Moss and Captain Chambers, with some of the marines, stayed there. During the hours of darkness knocking was kept up on the fort gates, to ascertain whether the occupants were on guard, or to induce one or two of them to venture out. The Indians wanted some hostages.

With the coming of daylight, Lieut. Carey, with three boats laden with sailors and marines, and a little later two additional boats, landed and set torch to small heaps of rubble that had escaped the previous conflagration.

The work of destruction was pointed out to Chief Jim, the prisoner on board the warship. In reply to the same question as to his willingness to reveal the identity of the murderers, he returned a defiant refusal.

There was no more of the village to destroy. It, and most of the food stored for winter, had burned.

"Now," he was asked, "tell us or we'll have to smash the canoes?"

This was a serious matter, for despite the affection that the Indians had for their homes, their love of their canoes was greater. They were their only means of travel, and provided them with the means of fishing and of hunting.

"No," stubbornly reiterated the chief.

Destruction

The work of destruction of the canoes was commenced. Fine, big dugouts, in which the tribesmen went as far south as Puget Sound; medium-sized cedar craft and even the little vessels that were used for paddling about the bay were smashed. Roughly 100 canoes were demolished — and still Jim was firm in his determination not to divulge the names of the guilty.

There was nothing more that could be done to punish the Fort Rupert Indians for their contumacy. The corvette sailed away, taking Chief Jim off to Victoria. There lawyers and police begged and pleaded with the Indian to tell what he knew of the murder. He remained silent.

There was some suspicion that Jim himself might have been concerned in the killing, but if he was, the authorities never found out—nor did they discover the guilty parties.

After holding the Indian in jail for some weeks they let him go.

Now the story is all but forgotten, except for the name of the quiet little cove.

Policing the coast was not a job the Navy liked, but it had to be done, and it was owing to the work of the ships of war, very largely, that British Columbia was spared the experiences of the Indian wars that plagued the American territories of Washington and Oregon.